

OBITUARY

Zdravko Pusko Ježić

(1931–2005)

Zdravko Pusko Ježić was born on August 17, 1931 in Niš (Serbia). He finished elementary school, the first four grades of secondary school and the Federal Technical School, chemistry department (1948), in Zagreb. After completing technical school, he worked as a chemical technician in Oil Refinery Sveta Klara (1948–1950). In 1950, he enrolled in the Chemical Technology Department of the Technical Faculty, University of Zagreb.

While still in secondary school, he was actively engaged in sports. He played handball, volleyball and basketball. He took part in cross-country races and in winter he went cross-country skiing all by himself. Ježić began his very successful swimming and water-polo career in 1944 in the swimming club called *Zagreb* and since 1945 he was an active member of the sports club *Mladost*, where he practiced swimming and played water-polo. He played for the junior water-polo team since 1946 and for the senior team since 1948. He was a member, and captain, of the junior national water-polo team from 1949 to 1952. In 1950 he started playing for the senior national team as well, and took part in all the matches from 1950 to 1960. He played with the national team in 113 matches in eleven seasons. He was the national team captain since 1957. At the Mediterranean Games in Beirut he played his hundredth match for the national team – the first of all the national team members. Playing with the national water-polo team, he won a number of trophies: 1. *European championships*: Vienna 1950 – bronze medal, Torino 1954 – silver medal, Budapest 1958 – silver medal; 2. *Olympic Games*: Helsinki 1952 – silver medal, Melbourne 1956 – silver medal, Rome 1960 – fourth place; 3. *Trofeo Italia*: Nijmegen 1953 – first place, Zagreb 1957 – second place; 4. *World University Games*: Paris 1957 – gold medal, Torino 1959 – gold medal; 5. *Mediterranean Games*: Beirut 1959 – gold medal. At the Olympic Games in Helsinki (1952) and Melbourne (1956) he played the FINA gala matches of the World against the Others (once for the World, and once for the Others). In his book *Water-polo*, Bela Rajki included him among the best world water-polo players of that time, as point player along with the Hungarian Kalman Markovics. After his



active water-polo career, he worked as coach to the water-polo team of Midland, Michigan (1967–1970). For his contribution to the world water-polo, he was elected, as the first Croat, into the International Water-Polo Hall of Fame. He was given the diploma at a ceremony organized for this purpose during the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in August 1984. Throughout the Olympic year of 1988, he featured on the Dow Chemical Company advertisements in *Newsweek* and on TV, as the first of their best employees, under the slogan – *First in sports, first in research*.

His superior sports career did not interfere with his studies nor prevent him from achieving top marks. He graduated in 1958 from the Faculty of Chemical Engineering, University of Zagreb. He did his military service in 1958–1959 and started to work for the Radioindustry-Zagreb (RIZ) in 1960, wherefrom he was moved to the Organic-chemical Industry (OKI) in 1961. He earned his doctor's degree in 1962 at the Faculty of Chemical Engineering by defending the doctoral thesis entitled *A Contribution to the Knowledge of Melamine Preparation from Urea* (»Prilog poznavanju priprave melamina iz uree«). In October 1964, he started his post-doctoral studies in the Department of Medicinal Chemistry, Uni-

versity of Michigan (Ann Arbor), where he worked on anti-malaria drugs with J. H. Burckalter. Two years later (1966), he started working as a chemist researcher for the Dow Chemical Company on the development of new polymers. He advanced steadily in the company: project manager (1968), research team leader (1969), director of research (1971) and director of research of the company facility in Texas (1973), where he worked on the development of urethane and oxide polymers. In October 1974, he was appointed technical director of the company DOKI (joint venture between Dow Chemical Company and OKI). He was engaged in the selection, training and management of the group of engineers and technicians who later became the backbone of the new company. He was responsible for procuring the necessary permits for the construction of the Žitnjak plant in Zagreb, and the start-up of the polystyrene plant in the summer of 1978. He went back to the USA in 1979, where he became director of the Laboratory for technical servicing and development of epoxy resins in Freeport (Texas). One summer, I visited him there and spent some wonderful time with him, his charming wife Božena and another visitor, a former water-polo player Mladen Jonke, also a graduate from our *Alma Mater*. One of Ježić's hobbies was marathon running, so tried to persuade me to join him for about 10 miles jogging every morning. I declined since I prefer walking. After his time in Texas, he was appointed director of the new materials development (1984), and since 1989 to his retirement (1996) he serv-

ed as director of development and adviser for the area of plastics and synthetic fibers at the company headquarters in Midland (Michigan).

After retirement, he became honorary professor at the School of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, University of Oklahoma (Norman) and the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology in Zagreb. He was an honorary member of the Society for Plastics and Rubber, and a member of the International Editorial Board of *Polymers*. He authored and co-authored a large number of scientific and professional papers, as well as 27 (19 American) patents for the synthesis of different polymeric compounds and production of polymers and synthetic fibers.

Zdravko Pusko Ježić passed away in Long Island on June 19, 2005.

I have known Pusko from his early water-polo playing days. We met in the 1950's at the swimming pool *Mladost* in Zagreb and have remained friends ever since. We played volleyball together for the University of Zagreb during the interuniversity games – he was an excellent volleyball player. He excelled in any sport that he played. He was even winning marathon races late in life. His house was full of sports trophies including Olympic Games medals. A great person, great friend, great athlete and a great applied chemist has left us too soon.

Nenad Trinajstić